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ISABELLA.

A STORY FOUNDED ON FACT.

IT is a common remark, that the dull and insensible part of mankind are often the favourites of fortune, and pass from the cradle to the grave exempt from those trials and vicissitudes which blight the early hopes of the sanguine and susceptible; or, in the beautiful language of the poet,

"The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers,
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns."

Never, perhaps, was this truth more strikingly exemplified, than in the following simple story.

Isabella Ormsley was the only child of parents who idolised her; and who, detecting nothing in her temper or dispositions which to their partial scrutiny required correction, permitted her to grow up the victim of blind indulgence, and of morbid sensibility. With Isabella, to hope was to be blest; disappointment, with all its withering consequences, experience had neither taught her to expect, nor prepared her to endure. Born in the retirement of a remote little village in the north of England, to which the limited income of her parents chiefly confined them, she received a home education; where, escaping alike the exhaustion of over-teaching and the common-place of fashionable and fictitious sentiment, her mind retained its original vigour, and expanded in all its native freshness. Though her acquirements were restricted to the simple elements of reading and writing, Isabella betrayed no deficiency in those graces and accomplishments which distinguish the well-bred female; nature had lavishly bestowed on her those endowments, which art and dullness vainly strive to emulate. She possessed a pleasing form; a taste the most refined, and pure; and a glowing imagination, which shed its magic influence on all around her. Animated by a never ending variety of thought, she was alternately the laughing romp, or the sentimental idealist; and, perfectly unfettered by those minute and teasing restrictions, which so frequently paralyze the mind of the young female, it was her delight to wander

"From morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve,"

among the rocky chasms of the mountains; or, if fatigued by her rambles, or enfeebled by the heat of the mid day sun, to seek for shelter in some solitary nook, where, reposing on her mossy couch, she could watch the light motions of the fleecy clouds as they floated in the clear azure of the expanded skies;

and yielding, as she peacefully reclined, to the soft reveries of hope, form plans for her future life as remote and as ethereal as the objects on which she gazed.

With these simple attractions, it was Isabella's fate to captivate the heart of a young English officer; and on her sixteenth birth-day to become his bride. Their union was celebrated in the early months of spring, when nature, in her mildest glow, seemed conforming to their placid hopes of happiness. Captain Edwards had come to Wales in quest of health; or, as the village gossips wisely insinuated, had been directed thither by fate, to meet with her who was destined to be his partner in the pilgrimage of life. The young couple certainly appeared formed for each other by nature's most partial hand; the same tastes, the same thoughts, characterised them: while the countenance of the one was a mirror that reflected back the thoughts which rose spontaneous in the other's soul. Alike in all their habits and pursuits, the simplest pleasures were sufficient to delight them; a walk at early dawn to watch the rising sun, or the song of the thrush at even, as they strolled by the side of the silver brook, wimpling through a luxuriant orchard, that adorned their little dwelling, was enough to confer happiness on those, who, in the possession of each other, had every wish fulfilled. It might, indeed, have been believed that heaven, pleased with their innocence and primitive contentment, had brought them together to begin a life of endless bliss.

Such thoughts, however, are but the day-dreams of creative fancy. Never yet did this world present a scene of uninterrupted enjoyment. Capt. Edwards remained only to hear himself hailed the father of a lovely boy, when he received peremptory orders to join his regiment, then sent on foreign service. The parting was dreadful. For a considerable time after her husband had left the house, Isabella remained in a state of insensibility. Her parents, now roused to a conviction of the fatal strength of those feelings which their indulgence had nourished, hung weeping over her, with fond entreaties that she would not destroy herself by the excess of her sorrow. Deprived, however, of the society of the husband she adored, and yielding to ideal terrors for his safety, Isabella indignantly repelled consolation, as if it were a sin to be consoled. Imagination, the sunlight of youth, whose brilliant tints shed a delusive glare over all the prospects of early life, deepens, as time advances, the gloom of increasing years, and shrouds the mind in mists of apprehension and mistrust, which the light of religion alone can dissipate. In her waking visions, and in her midnight slumbers, Isabella was the prey of dreary and dark forebodings. Her feverish

fancy represented her husband encompassed by dangers the most appalling. Sometimes, she beheld him pale, wounded, mutilated; without a friend to administer a drop of cold water, to cool his burning lips; or, as an unburied corpse, forgotten on the desolate field, over which the rage of battle had passed. Starting from these mental horrors, she would clasp her hands, and weep in utter helplessness. She was in this condition, when an aged domestic, whose long services had given her many privileges in the family, drew aside the curtains of her bed, and rather sternly said—"You will provoke the judgment of an offended God, my child. You weep before his chastising hand has been raised to afflict you. Be warned in time: you may have better cause for tears—your infant has drawn poison from your bosom, and is ill, very ill indeed."—In terror-struck contrition, Isabella fixed her eyes upon the speaker, and in faltering accents demanded to see her child; then, clasping her hands across her aching bosom, she sat for a few moments motionless, and self-condemned in the presence of her God. The prayer her heart began to dictate, was interrupted by the return of the nurse with her babe. Eagerly she caught him to her bosom: his little features were sunk and colourless, and his whole appearance indicated speedy dissolution. The fibres round Isabella's mouth quivered, as she clasped him in speechless agony; and discovered, for the first time, how unbounded was a mother's capacity for suffering.

From this moment, all other thoughts gave place to anxiety for the health of her child, over whose couch she hung in all the breathlessness of acute suspense. In spite, however, of all her solicitude, the boy grew hourly worse; till, in the anguish of her helplessness, she sent for Mr. Bently, the village clergyman, in hopes that his prayers might move the powers of heaven to spare his life. Mr. Bently was a man of calm and unobtrusive piety; and, informed of Isabella's wish to see him, he was soon beside the bed which contained her afflicted child. For a few moments, he stood silently contemplating the innocent features of the little sufferer. "Of such," said he, in a tone of tenderness, "is the kingdom of heaven." A violent burst of grief from Isabella roused him to a recollection of his present duty; and, placing himself immediately in a posture of supplication, he earnestly besought the Divine Disposer of events to spare her boy. Trembling in every nerve, she listened silently; until, changing his form of prayer, Mr. Bently implored the Almighty to pour consolation into the heart of the bereaved parent, if in his wisdom he had ordained to deprive her of her child—suddenly he felt himself grasped by the agonized mother, who strove to arrest

his speech. "Oh, not that!" faltered she in strong hysterical emotion—"not that! Pray only for his recovery—I cannot—no, I cannot bear to lose him." Extremely shocked, Mr. B. turned to reprove her; but she was in no state to bear reproof. Bewildered and terrified at her own presumptuous impiety, she had sunk, with a self-abased imploring look, at his feet.

The frown which had darkened the good man's brow, was obliterated by a tear, as he gently raised her. Scarcely conscious of what she did, she bent forward; and, fixing her straining eyes upon her child, perceived that he had fallen into a tranquil slumber; when, placing her fore-finger upon her lip to enjoin silence, Mr. Bently, with an inward ejaculation for mercy from that Being whom he believed she had offended, cautiously withdrew. From that hour, every indication of disease seemed to have left the child; and the heart of his delighted mother glowed with gratitude towards heaven, as she again felt the soft pressure of his eager lips, in quest of his accustomed nourishment.

It was with infinite pleasure that Mr. Bently learned, on repeating his visit to the cottage, that the little Charles had been pronounced completely out of danger. On recalling to mind Isabella's impatience under affliction, he felt an earnest desire to converse with her on subjects belonging to her eternal welfare; but, to his deep regret, no such opportunity was afforded to him. Relieved of her fears, Isabella felt supremely blest; but, remembering not the hand which conferred the blessing, she devoted her time to the flippant conversation of every-day visitors, who came to intrude their congratulations on the recovery of the child, with the same carelessness with which they would have condoled for his death; their only real motive in coming at all being to rid themselves of time, that most formidable enemy of the idle.

As ardent natures are apt to be but too exclusively devoted in their attachments, the little Charles soon became the great idol of his mother's affections; in her adoration of him, her dependence on the Almighty, and the duty she owed to her own kind parents, were alike forgotten; her child became the only object in earth, or heaven, that exclusively employed her thoughts. The aged couple did not, however, murmur at the change; experience had convinced them, that the human affections are most prone to descend, and that while parental love is the last ember which expires in the spent heart of age, the filial affections are quickly outgrown by fresher feelings. Charles being at length old enough to accompany his mother in her walks, it was to her a sweet amusement to bedeck his brow with those early spring flowers

whose budding freshness resembled his own infancy, and innocence; or in summer, to fill his lap with luxuriant fruits, and to direct his thoughts to the enlivening influence of that sun which had brought them to perfection; or when the fierce torrents burst from their wintry beds, to lead him along the ridges of the mountains, and point out to him, the calm grandeur of nature, when shrouded in the repose of dissolution.—It was at the close of one of the loveliest days in autumn, that Isabella was returning from one of these rambles with her boy, that a shriek of anguish, which seemed to proceed from her peaceful home, burst on the stillness of the air. Panting, and fearful, she stopt to listen, but the sound had ceased, and all was still. Sometimes the most joyful moments of life are clouded by some sudden and dark reverse: as a brilliant illumination of the sky, frequently precedes approaching storms. This had been one of the happiest days in Isabella's life; never had the heavens appeared so bright, or her boy so beautiful; she had led him through paths richly variegated by the brilliant tints of the fallen foliage, to the grove where she had met his father, and first heard his tale of love.—It was a consecrated spot; and recalling to memory, as she lingered there, her husband's manner, and mode of expression, she gave way to the delusion of the moment, and entered into an ideal conversation with him, which she continued till her heated fancy became confused.—A deep horror fell upon her senses: and starting from her reverie, she shivered as a chill air circled round her, and something fleetier than wind rushed quickly past. Recovering from the shock, she rallied her spirits, and taking her boy by the hand, began to retrace her steps towards home. She knew not wherefore she had been alarmed; she had seen nothing; but she had felt the presence of something most ghastly and terrible.—“My imagination is strangely perturbed to-day,” thought Isabella, as the renewed cries of grief smote her ear; when reaching the door of the cottage, she rushed impetuously into the parlour, and beheld her parents bending in an agony of affliction over the contents of an open letter. On perceiving her, they hastily attempted to conceal the scroll; but rendered desperate by an impulse of fear, she wildly snatched the fatal paper, and encountering, at the same moment, the commiserating looks of her mother —“He is dead,” she shrieked, “his spirit has already crossed me;” and without further confirmation of her suspicion, she fell into violent convulsions. Her struggles at length yielded to a heavy stupor, and she was put to bed; but, soon recovering to a full consciousness of her widowed state, she gave way to a wild rebellious sorrow, which for some time deprived her of her reason.

Happily these violent paroxysms are seldom lasting, and are less injurious to the mental powers than the slow canker of calmer griefs. As when the sudden conflict of the elements subsides, nature assumes even a softer freshness; so does the mind revive, when the passion that laid it waste has been exhausted. Persons of acute feelings are commonly averse to have their wounds probed by the sympathy of condoling friends; but when left to themselves, their recovery, when it takes place, is generally complete. Isabella, after some months' confinement to a dark and lonely apartment, returned to society, and was won back to something like happiness, by the smiles of her boy; and before many years had elapsed, she felt in her increasing affections towards him, that the wound had closed over the memory of his father.—Captain Edwards had often signified a wish in his letters to Isabella, that their son should be bred to the profession of arms. Charles, too, was naturally of a gay and valorous disposition, fond of show, and eager to make a figure on the great theatre of life. The time had now arrived, when, in obedience to the wishes of his father, he was to be sent to a Military Academy. At parting, he cheered his disconsolate mother, by holding up to her view representations of his future glory; while she, with all a mother's pride, anticipated the time, when at his return home, she should behold his youthful form arrayed in the military costume. It is a melancholy truth, that we never separate for a long period in this world, and appear to each other at our re-union the same individuals as when we parted; nor does home, however endeared to our remembrance, ever seem the same home as when we left it. How different, too, are the feelings of a mother and a son at parting, when the one retires to quiet and solitude, and the other, freed from all the shackles of childhood, sets out "to push his fortune," amid all the excitements of new and bustling scenes.

As Charles walked forward to meet the London Mail, his eyes wandered impatiently over those hills which had hitherto bounded his prospects, and then settled on the earth with that downward look which we assume when forming plans of intense interest. His mother retired into her lonely room, and went to bed. Meanwhile Charles reached the coach, and soon found himself associated with companions whose remarks and modes of thinking were as new to him as their faces; and, after a pleasing journey, he arrived within a few miles of London, and alighted in safety at the place of his destination.

His first letter to his mother was filled with the most transporting assurances of his happiness, and lavish encomiums on the engaging qualifications of his new associates. The second was less lively; and contained little more than a demand for

a supply of cash, which, though extremely inconvenient at the time, Isabella too willingly complied with. It was now a considerable time before she again heard from him; and, when she did, the letter contained a new entreaty that she would send him all the money she could spare; and, to gratify this request, she left herself without a shilling. After this proof of her indulgence, no intelligence from the ungrateful Charles reached her for many weeks; while, in addition to the uneasy feeling his silence caused her, she was informed of some rumours to his disadvantage. His unbounded extravagance, and the mutinous dispositions he betrayed, had brought on him the resentment of his tutors, who had threatened to expel him, if he did not amend his conduct. At length, his mother's repeated solicitations, that he would write, were answered by a letter filled with indignant complaints of the restrictions to which he was subjected, and a threat that if they were longer continued, he would break through all restrictions, and leave the academy. The letter concluded with a peremptory demand for a larger supply of money, and an acknowledgment that he was greatly in debt. This communication cost Isabella many tears; for she had not the means of immediately complying with his unexpected demand. Besides, a second report of his increasing thoughtlessness, and of his being addicted to profligate society, had reached her in a letter from a friend. Some reproof her maternal fears suggested to be requisite; but, resolved not to convey it in the form of a reproach, she secretly disposed of her jewels, that her rebuke might not be rendered abortive by a denial of his present claim on her indulgence. The letter, enclosing the money which she thus raised, was bathed in tears, and contained the most earnest entreaties for his amendment, with a request, the most gently insinuated, that it would be necessary for him to retrench his expenditure, as she no longer possessed the power to send him fresh remittances. To this letter no return of post brought her any answer; and the pangs of suspense kept her feverish and restless. After a long and painful interval, she was half reclining on a sofa, and forming plans to undertake an immediate journey, in quest of Charles, when Mr. Bently, with an expression of pain and recent horror on his features, entered the parlour. On Isabella's accosting him as usual, he turned abruptly from her, as if unable to return her salutations, and walking to the window, stood looking from thence for a considerable time in silence; his attitude and manner were alarming;—her heart beat tumultuously, for she knew Mr. Bently to be in the habit of learning tidings of her son. Rising in an agitated manner she approached the window where he stood,

and laying her hand with an emotion of awe upon his shoulder, implored him to inform her of the worst, as she quickly guessed that he had something very disagreeable to unfold. "Unhappy woman!" he replied, "alone you must not hear my tidings, you will need support; summon your parents to your aid, and I will speak, though would to God another would relieve me of the office." With an effort at calmness, he drew his hand across his eyes, and gently pulled the bell-string; but a piercing shriek from Isabella had brought her parents, alarmed and breathless, into the room, where they beheld her, pale and trembling, and holding by the chair for support. They turned to Mr. Bentley for an explanation of the cause, who, summoning all his fortitude, mildly said, "we worship a God, my friends, who afflicts us only that he may bring us to himself. He has permitted a sore evil to come upon this house; but his mercy can heal the wound his justice has inflicted. You must look, my child," addressing Isabella, "to his promises of eternal happiness." "Put me out of anguish," she faltered, sinking back on her seat, "let me know the worst, let me hear all the misery of my fate." "I fear the shock may annihilate your existence," he solemnly replied, "and few of us are prepared for sudden death—but I linger cruelly, and will no longer withhold from you the fatal truth. Your son, your poor Charles, was expelled the Academy, for misconduct; he has since been convicted of forgery, and is condemned."

The frown of God had now overshadowed all the prospects of Isabella's life. We draw a veil over the scene which followed; for who can describe the agonies of remorse, or shame; and where both are united, who can sustain the conflict! That evening, and for many following weeks, the windows were closed; a deep silence reigned around the walls of the little cottage, and the rough peasant dropt a tear of pity as he passed the door; and often, in the deep silence of midnight, Isabella's voice was heard moaning and breathing supplications to heaven. Throughout the day, heart-struck and heedless of all that was passing around her, she lay with eyes half closed, and her finger pressed upon some favourite passage of the bible. Since the thunderbolt of her son's misconduct had struck her, she had never once mentioned his name. This might be resentment.—It might be a penance she had inflicted on herself, for her former idolatry towards him; she never revealed her sentiments; she never complained of her misfortunes; till after many months of silent suffering, she signified a wish to converse with Mr. Bentley.

On entering her room, he found her sitting opposite to the window, and half reclining against the pillow of her bed;

her eyes were lifted towards the heavens, and the pale moon shed its beams on her subdued and ghastly features; she was dressed in full white, and presented a fearful semblance of her former self. Mr. Bently started; but, checking himself, he came forward, took her passive hand, and spoke to her in the mildest accents of consolation. Made for the first time sensible of his presence, she convulsively returned the pressure of his hand. "I knew," she said, in a husky and hurried tone, "that it is long since over; but tell me, tell me, where you have laid him.—He perished, I know, upon the scaffold! In my dreams I beheld him there." "He did," interrupted Mr. Bently, mildly; "but he died a christian, and perfectly resigned; I was with him in his last moments, and attended his remains back to his native place. He rests in the village church-yard, interred in the grave of his forefathers."

Isabella clasped her hands, and, raising her eyes to heaven, remained for a few moments lost in prayer. Then rising with difficulty, and resting on the arm of Mr. Bently, "lead me," she said, "to the place: there is no longer any sin in the request." Mr. Bently, perceiving her weakness, strove to dissuade her from the rash attempt of exposing her feeble form to the night air; but finding her resolute, he forbore to irritate her by further expostulation. "Let us go," she said, "the pale moon invites us; the moon is a friend to the unhappy; and never more may the returning sun afflict me, by the bright contrast he presents to the darkness that I find within." Mr. Bently guided her from the room; and, unperceived, they left the house together. The church-yard was partially concealed by a few scattered trees, which waved their dark branches o'er the silvered graves. Beneath the gloom of these Mr. Bently led the childless mourner: they paused at the foot of a sod, the dark outlines of which seemed to reveal the human form. Isabella, with her eyes resting on the spot, stood a few moments in silence. But nature was still strong within her; and overcome by one last human impulse, she threw herself upon the turf,—extended her feeble arms to clasp it—and, in the effort, expired!

B. G.

THE SONG OF LOVE.

In sunny days, when Love was young,
Sweet tales he told, sweet songs he sung;
O'er hills and dales his echoes rung,—
All listen'd to his melody.

He told a thousand pleasing things;
Sung sweeter far than syren sings;
The hours flew on their golden wings;
Hope fill'd each soul with extacy.

To taste the joys Love could impart,
All listen'd to his winning art;
He stole applause from every heart,
For every heart glow'd sympathy.

Love, like a dream, the hours beguil'd,
While Beauty, Nature's darling child,
Stood list'ning, look'd on all, and smil'd,
Pleas'd with the gay variety.

M.